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TRAINING OF DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION SCIENTISTS IN AFRICA

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I. Introduction

Lack of trained manpower to man the existing documentation and information centres in Africa is being cited as a stumbling block in the development of information and documentation services in Africa. The type of professional training offered in Africa is at diploma and certificate level in the field of library science. No formal courses in information and documentation is offered in most schools which offer library studies programme.

The shortage of specialised local manpower and training facilities are particularly striking obstacles to the rapid development and effectiveness of information services in Africa. This situation is greatly affected by the general absence of systematic plans for organised training of information personnel and the rather low status given by governments in Africa to librarianship, documentation and information science. Support by governments in Africa is needed in terms of strengthening national information and documentation capabilities from which they would all benefit.

At present, in many countries, information services remain under staffed and highly dependent on expatriate personnel. Further, local personnel tend to be trained through fellowships granted by external donors which is hardly sufficient to close the gap between supply and demand in the information field. In addition, such fellowships are, in general, granted for in-service training only, and seldom for training within the two regions. The availability of training programmes initial qualifications or to extend their knowledge in the field of information science and documentation is limited. Where training exists, it is mainly traditional and oriented towards librarianship at the expense of more modern information service skills e.g. on-line retrieval, system's management, subject specialisation etc. The problems stated, strongly suggest that the governments of African countries should examine as a matter of urgency the question of supply of professional information and documentation personnel.

Nevertheless, it appears that while the shortage of qualified staff is unanimously recognised, lack of funds prevent the governments from giving the required assistance in this area. In addition, low salaries and poor status prevent the recruitment of enough qualified people. As a result, the possibilities of setting up local basic courses in information

science vary from country to country with some countries with an edge over others. In view of such conditions, the regionalisation of training courses seems to be a sensible solution.

It appears therefore that the best solution to the problem of manpower training will be to put the limited available resources into strengthening existing regional facilities in Africa, and to ensure that in formulating curricula, due attention is paid to Africa's needs and to technological changes. This approach will address the supply of local manpower. Regional schools of information and documentation sciences are probably the best solution to the needs of Africa. Despite the disadvantages of a regional versus a national school, there is not likely to be any real possibility of each country having its own school. Another danger of a national school might be the eventual oversupply of professionals within a decade.

II. Status of training of documentation and information scientists in Africa

There exist various schools in Africa offering courses in librarianship. As already stated, the type of professional training offered in Africa is mainly at diploma and certificate level in the field of library studies. No formal courses in information and documentation is offered in such schools.

Present training institutions

The following countries offer courses at diploma, certificate or degree levels in Africa. Readers should note that the listed countries, are the only ones known to offer courses which are open to other countries. Some institutions may not have been included but they do offer courses in Library, Information or Documentation Studies. It should therefore be understood that the listed institutions are only for showing a picture of the existing situation in Africa and should not be taken as comprehensive.

(i) Botswana

The University of Botswana is offering courses in Library Studies at diploma and certificate levels. Introductory courses in Information Sciences and Documentation are presently given but only on part-time basis. Plans are underway to start post-graduate studies in Information and Library Studies in 1986.

(ii) Algeria

It is known that some universities in Algeria give courses in Information Sciences. It is also known that

Algerian Government has been providing fellowships to African countries for studies in Algeria. However, at the moment we have scanty information on the level, duration and the numbers involved. Detailed information is being compiled by PADIC and will be made available to member States at a later date.

(iii) Uganda

For a long-time now since the days of the East African Community, Makerere University has been offering courses in Library Studies, at the East African School of Librarianship, at undergraduate diploma and certificate level. Presently the school is offering courses at post graduate diploma level, and some elements of information sciences and documentation have been included in their curriculum.

(iv) Kenya

Kenya is offering courses in Library and Archival Studies at the Kenya Polytechnic in Nairobi. These courses are being offered at certificate level only.

Latest development

The Kenya government has established the Moi University as the country's second University. In this University, a faculty of Information Sciences has been created and it will offer courses at Bachelor of Science level.

(v) Tanzania

The Tanzania Library Services offers Library Courses at certificate level. Plans are underway to create a library and information studies school at the Univeristy of Dar-es-Salaam.

(iv) Ghana

Ghana has been and still runs a regional school in Library and Archival studies at the University of Legon. Courses are offered at postgraduate, and undergraduate diploma and certificate level. The school was established with assistance from UNESCO.

(vii) Sudan

In the Sudan a two-year elementary courses in Library studies is being offered at the University of Khartoum. At Omdurman Islamic University, Library studies is offered at the Bachelors degree level.

(viii) Senegal

Courses in Information Science and Documentation are offered at diploma level, at the University of Dakar in Senegal.

(ix) Zambia

In Zambia studies in Library Science are offered at the University of Zambia at diploma and Bachelors degree level, and the Kindele Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe at certificate level.

(x) Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe plans to establish a library studies school. However, presently library studies is given at the Harare Polytechnic at diploma and certificate level.

(xi) Morocco

Morocco also runs courses in Information Science at, Rabat. It may also be noted that Morocco has established and runs a well equipped documentation centre which could serve as a practical training centre. Details of training facilities in Morocco also being compiled by PADIS.

(xii) Tunisia and Egypt

Like Morocco, Tunisia has an Information Science School situated in Tunis. Full details of courses being offered in Tunisia, i.e. duration, level of training etc. are being compiled. Egypt also has institutions offering courses in Information Sciences, whose details PADIS is compiling.

III. Latest developments in training of documentation and information scientists in Africa

One of the constraints which has been discussed in this paper is the lack of qualified information professionals in Africa. This problem is being maximized by the new technologies and the key role which they play in modern information services. These advanced information technologies, especially in their present form, have been less than user friendly and the information professional thus tends to become an important source of knowledge in the user's information search. However, the type of training institutions that exist in Africa now do not meet the above challenge in terms of production of competent information and documentation scientists. Coupled with the complexity of information these professionals have to deal with, it has led to a rethinking on the part of international organizations to establish full-fledged training institutions for documentation and information scientists in Africa.

The establishment of an African Regional Centre for Information Science (AFRIC)

To alleviate the problem of lack of trained documentation and information scientists in Africa, UNESCO, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and other organizations in co-operation with the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, are establishing a regional centre for information science. Plans to have this school operational are quite advanced, and the curriculum has been finalised. Courses at this Centre will be offered at the Masters degree level, and will inter-alia cover the following.

(i) Foundation and methods of Information Science.

(ii) Design of Information Systems.

(iii) Information Sources and Systems.

(iv) Sectional/Subject-oriented Information Sources and Systems.

(v) Communication and utilization of information.

(vi) Information Management and Economics.

(vii) Information Systems and Technologies. (For details consult the curriculum manual from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

This regional centre is being established primarily for the English speaking West Africa. A similar centre is being planned at the University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for the Eastern and Southern African countries.

IV. Efforts of United Nations Bodies and other international organizations in training of documentation and information scientists in Africa

(a) UNECA

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, through the Pan African Documentation and Information System is also playing a part in training of documentation and information scientists in Africa. PADIS was created by the ECA to facilitate development information exchange among ECA member States. The training that is offered by PADIS, aims at developing and coordinating a network of facilities capable of meeting the national requirements of Africa for technically competent information and documentation personnel who would collect, process, store and disseminate development information required for economic and social development planning.

The PADIS training programme is to ensure that Africa has a supply of trained personnel in PADIS-DEVSIS methodologies to facilitate participation of the African countries in PADIS through:

(i) producing an increased number of trained documentation personnel, and,

(ii) improving and maintaining the quality of documentation and information personnel already in service.

Type of training

The type of training given under this programme is dependent on the needs of each country, institution or a group of countries or institutions. Requests for specific training programmes are dealt with on individual basis.

However, PADIS offers the following courses and seminars which we feel help to meet best specific needs.

(1) Short full-time courses, with duration from one week to four weeks to provide intensive preparation for e.g. how to index using PADIS-DEVSIS methodologies or for a specialised group e.g. computer programmers.

(2) Technique or problem oriented workshops of several days to four weeks duration to develop very specific competencies or skills in some aspects of documentation centre management, system development etc.

(3) Assignment of PADIS staff on a temporary basis to national documentation centres to assist in In-Service Training Programme.

(4) Senior level seminars for top administration of documentation centres to up date them on PADIS-DEVSIS methodologies, adminstration etc.

(5) Training courses of 7 to 14 days in length for groups of information and documentation personnel to orient them to new ideas, approaches in regard to processing development information in line with PADIS-DEVSIS standards.

(6) Short seminars to provide a forum for persons with common professional interests, enabling them to exchange experiences, secure new concepts, learn of significant achievements standards of professional conduct.

Content

PADIS Training Programme normally covers the following broad areas of study:

1) PADIS Methodologies

2) Data Processing techniques

3) Data base management

4) Interactive information systems

5) Regional co-operation in information work

6) Microfilming and Reprography

7) How to participate in PADIS without computerisation in the first instance

8) Computerised documentation

9) User needs and PADIS systems etc.

Each of the mentioned areas of study represents a field of central importance in which significant developments are taking place and in which PADIS is active. Detailed programmes of studies based on the identified areas of study are normally designed to take account of the needs and backgrounds of those selected for participation in the activities of PADIS Training Programme.

(b) UNESCO

The United Nations Educational Scientific and cultural organization through its General Information Programme, continues to assist in the training of Africans in Information and Documentation. It has continued to fund, courses, seminars and workshops, and provided scholarships and fellowships for studies in information and documentation abroad. UNESCO, has also been instrumental in funding regional library schools like the one in the University of Legon in Ghana, and the East African School of Librarianship in Makerere, Uganda.

(c) Other organizations

Other organizations like the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the German Foundation for International Development (DSE), continue to provide fellowships and scholarships for studies in information and documentation. These also provide funds for running of seminars, courses, workshops in the field of documentation.

Concluding Remarks

For Africa, with meager resources regional schools like the one being established in the University of Ibadan are probably the best solution to the needs of Africa. With the increasing information technology for processing and retrieving of

information, Africa needs trained people in Documentation and Information Science, and the schools being set up in Ibadan and Addis Ababa Universities should be given great support by the African countries.

NOTE: A list of institutions offering Library and Information courses is being compiled by PADIS and will be published during 1980 and sent to the participants to this meeting. This list will be able to give up to date information on the type of courses being offered, duration, admission requirements, etc.